

First Women's Day took place in 1911 ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

This year, March 8, celebrated as International Women's Day (IWD) marks 100 years of the declaration and observation of the first International Women's day. The first official celebration of Women's Day happened on March 19 in 1911 in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland. The decision to observe an International Women's Day happened in 1910 at the second international conference of working women held in Copenhagen. At the meeting, Clara Zetkin, leader of the Women's Office for the Social Democratic Party in Germany, proposed that every year in every country there should be a celebration on the same day of Women's Day to press for various demands made by women. Zetkins suggestion was unanimously approved and the decision was implemented for the first time the following year, in 1911.

How did the idea of women's day develop?

Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a lot of turbulence in industrialized societies with women increasingly demonstrating against oppressive working conditions, poor pay and inequality. This also coincided with the rising demand by women for voting rights in various countries. In 1908, 15,000 women marched through New York City demanding shorter hours, better pay and voting rights. In 1909, the Socialist Party of America declared that February 28 would be celebrated as the first National Women's Day across the country. Until 1913, the last Sunday of February was celebrated as National Women's Day in the US. Fair wages and dignified conditions of work became the focus of many demonstrations by women. Russian women campaigning for peace on the eve of World War I observed their first IWD on the last Sunday of February in 1913. However, in 1913, a common agreement was reached and the IWD was transferred to March 8.

How did the IWD become globally accepted?

The United Nations designated 1975 as International Women's Year and the same year it gave official sanction to the IWD and began sponsoring International Women's Day events. All its member countries too started observing the IWD and women's group working for change in the status of women in these countries use the IWD to focus attention on issues about women's rights and to help push their agenda.

How is the IWD celebrated?

The IWD is observed in over a hundred countries. In many countries including Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cuba, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam it is an official holiday.

In China, Nepal and Madagascar, it is a holiday only for women. In several countries, it is customary for men to give the women in their lives, mothers, wives, girlfriends or sisters, flowers and small gifts on the occasion. In some countries such as Romania it is also observed as an equivalent of Mothers' Day, where children also give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers. In Italy, men give yellow mimosas to women. In Russia and Albania too, yellow mimosas and chocolate are the most common gifts on March 8.

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